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INFO RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 2299
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EAP/J, EAP/P, PM;
USTR FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE;
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SECDEF FOR OASD/PA;
CP BUTLER OKINAWA FOR AREA FIELD OFFICE;
PACOM HONOLULU FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ADVISOR

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SUBJECT: TOKYO MEDIA REACTION - SECRETARY RICE'S TRAVEL
TO MIDDLE EAST

LEAD STORIES: All Monday morning papers led with the Democratic Party of Japan's landslide in the House of Councillors election on Sunday. Despite the ruling LDP's crushing defeat, Prime Minister Abe expressed his resolve Sunday night to hold on to power.

"Can US Elicit Saudi Promise to Support Iraqi Government?" Washington correspondent Arimoto of the conservative Sankei reported (7/30): "Secretary of State Rice and Defense Secretary Gates will visit the Middle East beginning Monday to seek cooperation from countries in the region regarding restoring order in Iraq and the Palestinian territories. Given that the Bush administration is increasingly dissatisfied with what it believes is an attempt by Riyadh to weaken Iraq's al-Maliki government, attention is focused on whether Secretaries Rice and Gates will be able to elicit a promise from Saudi Arabia to support the Iraqi government. Secretary Rice will visit Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the Palestinian territories, with Secretary Gates accompanying her to Egypt and Saudi

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Arabia. It is unusual for the US secretaries of state and defense to visit foreign countries together, meaning that the USG views the joint visits to Egypt and Saudi Arabia as particularly important.... Although Saudi Arabia is the most important country in the region for the US, bilateral relations have been awkward since the start of the Iraq war in 2003, with Saudi King Abdullah in March criticizing the

'unjustified occupation' of Iraq by the US military. Some in the Bush administration have voiced concern that the Saudis are supporting anti-government forces in Iraq. US military and intelligence sources estimate the number of foreign fighters entering Iraq each month at 60 to 80 and that nearly half are coming from Saudi Arabia....."

SCHIEFFER